



Light

...on a new world

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a quarterly magazine focusing on the Bible and its message for today

- * God's plan in prophecy
- * What does Jesus' resurrection mean to you?
- * The Goldilocks Planet

VOLUME 27.3

Published for the Bexley Dawn
Christadelphians by:

Light Bible Publications

PO Box 362

Dartford

DA1 9GT, England

Editor: Colin Dryland

Correspondence: John Carpenter

Design: Roy Toms

ISSN 0047-4657

The Christadelphians believe the Bible (Old and New Testaments) to be the wholly inspired and infallible Word of God. Its principal theme is the salvation of mankind through the saving work of Jesus Christ and the setting up of the kingdom of God under his rulership when he returns to the earth.

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Volume 27.3

CONTENTS

Page

From the editor	3
"Your kingdom come"	5
What does Jesus' resurrection mean to you?	10
From our mailbag	16
The Goldilocks Planet	19
Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer	24
God's plan in prophecy	29

COVER:

The famous Selaron Steps in Rio de Janeiro, by Chilean artist Jorge Selaron. The steps featured prominently in the graphics for the recent Olympic Games in Rio (see opposite and back cover).

Note:

All Bible quotations taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) except where another version is indicated after the text.

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from the editor

By the time you read this, the 2016 Olympic Games will be sporting history. Those who have participated will reflect on their achievements in winning medals or perhaps be thinking about missed opportunities and the need for improving their skills.

The modern Olympics feature summer and winter competitions in which thousands of athletes from around the world participate. They are considered to be the world's foremost sporting events with more than 200 nations taking part and are held every four years.

Their creation was inspired by the ancient Olympics, which originated in Greece almost 3,000 years ago. They were revived in the late 19th century and have become the world's pre-eminent sporting competition. From the 8th century BC to the 4th century AD the Games were held in Olympia, located in south west Greece, in honour of the Greek god Zeus. The first modern Olympics took place in 1896 in

Athens, and featured 280 participants from just 13 nations, competing in 43 events.

The ancient Olympic Games were religious and athletic festivals held every four years at the sanctuary of Zeus in Olympia. Competition was among representatives of several city-states of ancient Greece. These Games featured mainly athletic but also combat sports such as wrestling and horse and chariot racing events. They were characterised by acts of violence, cheating and political intrigue – doesn't that sound familiar?

The aim of modern Olympians is to obtain a medal by coming first, second or third in their chosen sport. 'Going for gold' is the ultimate achievement of those who participate, for it represents the pinnacle of sporting endeavour in each event.

In New Testament times, the Greek Games were a familiar part of life. The Apostle Paul made a number of allusions to them

which provide powerful lessons for the followers of Jesus. In writing to the first century Christians at Corinth he drew a lesson from the athletes who competed at the Games:

'Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last for ever'

1 Corinthians 9.24,25 NIV

By contrast with the modern Olympics, in the ancient Greek Games there was only one prize – a crown or wreath made of leaves followed by a hero's welcome back home. The coronal wreath would not last. It would soon fade, wither, lose its colour and eventually turn to dust. But Paul encouraged the believers to compete for a prize that will not fade or perish. At the end of his life he wrote to Timothy about a race of a different kind. This is a race in which there will be many winners – those who strive like an athlete to finish the course and obtain the prize:

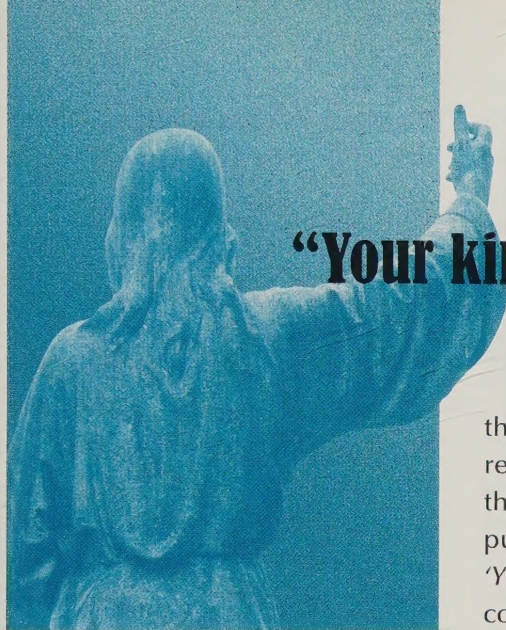
'...I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing'

2 Timothy 4.7, 8

In the ancient Greek Games, the winner's prize of a crown of interwoven leaves was a symbol of victory. In the modern Olympic Games the gold medal is also a symbol of victory. But neither of these count for anything in the race to which Paul was referring.

In the race for life, Paul reminded Timothy that both he and all Christ's true followers will receive a crown if they, like Paul, finish their course. This will not be a crown of leaves that will soon fade away but an unfading '*crown of righteousness*', a symbol of the great prize of eternal life to be given '*on that day*' when Jesus returns.

Will you be among those who will receive that great prize?



what did Jesus mean?

“Your kingdom come”

that Jesus tells us first of all to give recognition and honour to God, then to ask for a fulfilment of His purpose and will in the phrase ‘*Your kingdom come*’. The prayer continues with requests for our physical and spiritual needs. But how well do we understand that second element which Jesus placed in his ‘model’ prayer: ‘*Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*’?

look at the whole picture

In this world of multiple religions and many sects within those religions, how do we understand what the true teaching of the Bible is? The answer is to compare different parts of God’s Word with each other, so we get a complete picture of its teaching. We do this in every other part of life but sometimes fail to do it with the teaching of the Bible. Let us take an example:

‘And it came to pass, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, that one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” So he said to them, “When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”’

Luke 11.1, 2

This prayer that Jesus taught his followers, known as ‘The Lord’s Prayer’, has since been uttered many times throughout the world. It is worth looking at one element of it a little more closely to fully understand what Jesus meant. The prayer is very structured in



If you were to look at the picture above on its own, you might think these fish were swimming in their natural habitat. However, when you take the big picture below into view, you get a completely different impression of its location.



What then did Jesus mean when he prayed *'Your kingdom come'*? How does this request tie in with the rest of Scripture? There may be some confusion in our minds if we have been taught or heard that the reward for living a good life is to go to heaven when we die.

How does *'Your kingdom come'* fit in with that?

The simple answer is that it doesn't fit! Trying to rationalise those two things is very much like being given a big jigsaw puzzle in a box, except the picture on the lid does not match up with the one that all the pieces in the box make up. So to find out what Jesus actually meant we need to take a few more 'pieces of the jigsaw' and see if we can get a better idea of what the overall picture really is.

Jesus is to come back to the Earth

The key to understanding this request for God's kingdom to come is to grasp another essential aspect of the Bible's message. The basis for this is found in the book called *'The Acts of the Apostles'*. At the beginning of this book the angels clearly told the followers of Christ, both then and now, that he would come back to Earth from heaven:

'And while they looked steadfastly towards heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,

who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven".

Acts 1.10,11

As we start to build up the full picture, the second coming of Christ is fundamental to understanding the reward for those who follow him. There is another passage in the Bible that often gets misapplied because it is cut short when quoted, and is focused on without reference to the entire picture:

'In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also'.

John 14.2, 3

Verse two is often quoted to show that Jesus has gone away into heaven to prepare a place there for his followers. But look at verse three – what does it say? It is clearly consistent with the statement from Acts that Jesus will come again to the Earth. It says

that he will receive his followers to himself after he has returned from heaven. Later in that same chapter of John, Jesus repeats the same teaching: '*You have heard me say to you, "I am going away and coming back to you..."*' (John 14.28).

Have we got enough pieces of the puzzle though to form a good understanding of the full picture? Probably not! So let us find some more.

a kingdom needs a king

Now we have part of a picture that shows us that Jesus is coming back to the Earth but that has not covered the stated request in the Lord's prayer: '*Your Kingdom come*'. So let's do a little more searching to see what else we can find. We need to find a part of the picture that deals with another important aspect - a kingdom needs a king. Jesus told his disciples about this aspect in the following verses:

'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.' Matthew 25.31

'And he (Jesus) said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand and the other on the left, in your kingdom"'.
Matthew 20.21

In the first of these verses there is another definitive statement of the promise of Jesus to come back to the Earth and that he will be the one sitting on the throne as king. In the second passage we see again that it is he who is king and also that his followers expect to be with him there as their reward. Are there any more pieces of the puzzle that support that last point?

the promised reward for being faithful

Hebrews chapter 11 has a really good account of those through history who have followed God's way, the things they have done and the things they have endured to receive the promised reward for being faithful. So have they all received a reward in heaven? What does the Bible say?

'And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,

God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us'.
Hebrews 11.39,40

In another place, in the book of Acts, we read about David, King of Israel, who in his time was described as a 'man after God's own heart' (see Acts 13.22). He surely would be worthy of the ultimate reward for the righteous. We can bring this part of the picture together with the others:

'For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool'"'. Acts 2.34, 35



In the verses from Hebrews and Acts there is a clear indication that the followers of God's way died in hope, not having received a reward in heaven. But how then will the reward be given and received, especially as so many followers have died? Paul explained it very simply to the first century Christians in Corinth:

'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the first-fruits, afterwards those who are Christ's at his coming'. 1 Corinthians 15.22,23

The key element here is the 'making alive' of those who have followed God's way *'at his coming'*. Notice again that Christ is to come back to the Earth. So what did Jesus mean when he said *'Your kingdom come'*?

concluding thoughts

From the passages we have looked at it is evident that Jesus was referring to a literal kingdom on the Earth, with himself as its king and with his true followers around him who will receive a reward because they have been faithful.

There are two other references from the Bible which we would like to finish with because they both speak of this purpose of God with the Earth and the people on it. Jesus set out very clearly in his teaching the final reward for those who follow God's way:

'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth'.

Matthew 5.5

The overriding purpose of God is to make the Earth a suitable dwelling place for the faithful and fill it with His glory:

'For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea'.

Habakkuk 2.14

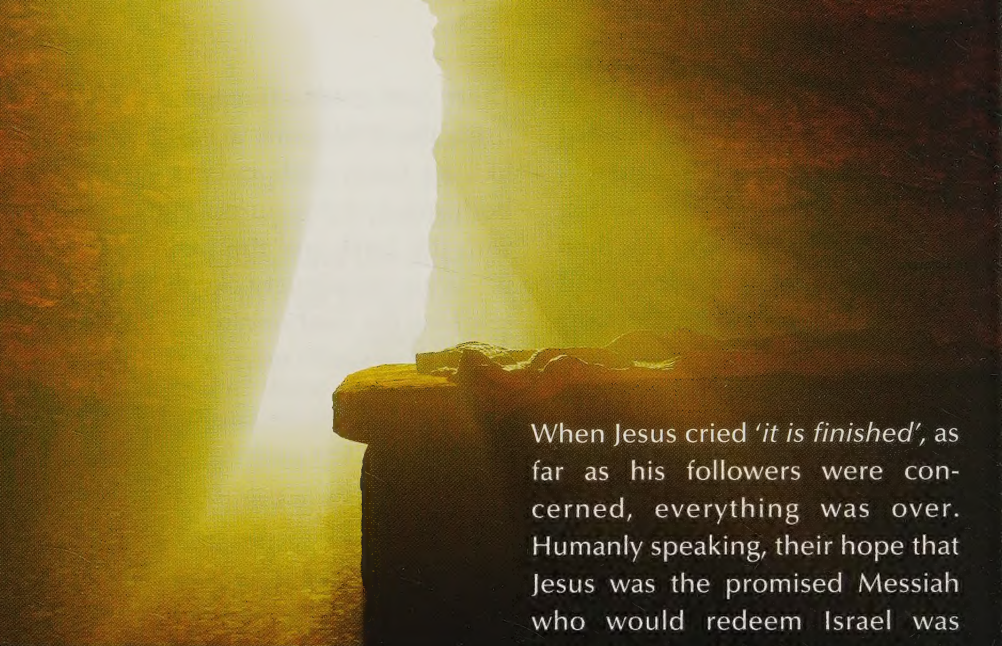
The followers of Christ can look forward to that time and are encouraged to pray for it as Jesus told us, because it will be very different from our present experience.

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. Luke 11.2

Pete Meadows Birmingham, UK



what does Jesus' resurrection mean to you?

When Jesus cried '*it is finished*', as far as his followers were concerned, everything was over. Humanly speaking, their hope that Jesus was the promised Messiah who would redeem Israel was now gone, and there was no possibility of this being realised. Luke records the words of one of them as they sadly left Jerusalem on the road to Emmaus:

'But we were hoping that it was he who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened'.

Luke 24.21

There was not the slightest indication that any of Christ's followers expected an immediate resurrection, they were blind to the circumstances. All they could do was to put the blame on the chief priest and their rulers who handed Jesus over to be sentenced to death.

Amazingly, the priests who were hostile to Christ's teaching could see the possibility of his resurrection. They were so concerned about this they went to Pilate and asked for a guard to be placed over the tomb. Pilate answered:

‘...“You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how.” So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard’.

Matthew 27.65, 66

We might read this with a tinge of smugness. Look at Jesus' unbelieving disciples! Didn't Christ tell them he was going to rise from the dead on the third day? Are we any different? Don't we feel sad or angry when things go wrong? Does this not often change to fear and anxiety? This is a natural human reaction and those disciples were no different from us.

the resurrection morning

Early on the resurrection morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went to the tomb. It was the first day of the

week (our Sunday morning). They went to anoint the body of Jesus. This was an incredible act of faith and devotion, given the hostility that had surrounded Jesus during his final mortal hours. There were real problems ahead of them; their own security wasn't guaranteed since the religious leaders of the Jews were still very hostile towards Jesus and his followers. The guards stationed at the entrance of the tomb could have accused them of an attempt to steal the body and interfering with the grave; a very serious offence, no doubt punishable by death.

Remember that the priests had already decided to publicise the story that the disciples had stolen the body. There was also that gigantic stone at the entrance of the grave. Mark records the question they asked: ‘*Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?*’ (Mark 16.3). That was something quite beyond their capabilities. But they were so determined to administer this last service to Christ that they would not even allow this to deter them.

the empty tomb

Then Luke records that they found the stone rolled away and entered the tomb. Two angels appeared and said: *'Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!'* (Luke 24.5,6).

The women were not only in the wrong place. Their minds were clouded with the wrong thoughts. As much as they loved Jesus, they did not expect him to rise from the dead. The same was true of two disciples who were travelling to Emmaus that same morning:

'...Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know him'. Luke 24. 15, 16

They told this fellow traveller on the road how devastated they were by the recent events:

'...we were hoping that it was he who was going to redeem Israel'. Jesus replied: 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?' Luke 24. 21,25,26

John records that on the evening of the same day *'when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you"'* (John 20.19).

Luke adds that when Jesus appeared to the disciples, they thought they were seeing a spirit. But Jesus assured them with these words:

'Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.

Handle me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have' Luke 24. 38, 39

Fear meant that the disciples' faith was weak, and that they still lacked understanding. Above all, they could not believe that Christ had risen from the dead.

the resurrection – a message of hope for believers

The lessons for us from these events are we should remember that Christ suffered first on the cross and warned that many disciples would have to suffer

something similar. He did not tell us to be overwhelmed by grief when that happens. Importantly he also spoke many times of his resurrection and ascension to his Father's side. He also proclaimed the Gospel or good news about his return to the earth to raise his followers from the dead. At that time he will establish God's Kingdom on earth and reward his faithful followers with eternal life.

Luke chapter 21 contains a prophecy of Jesus about future events. He told his disciples about the terrible state the world will be in immediately before his return. Nations would be at war, people being cruel and unkind to one another, with complete disrespect for the things concerning God. This chapter is worth a careful read to get the full picture. There are many indications that we are living in those times today. Without Christ's resurrection there would be no prospect of his return to establish a kingdom of peace and harmony on earth. But as the Apostle Paul told the men of Athens:

'... he (God) has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained. He

has given assurance of this to all, by raising him from the dead'.

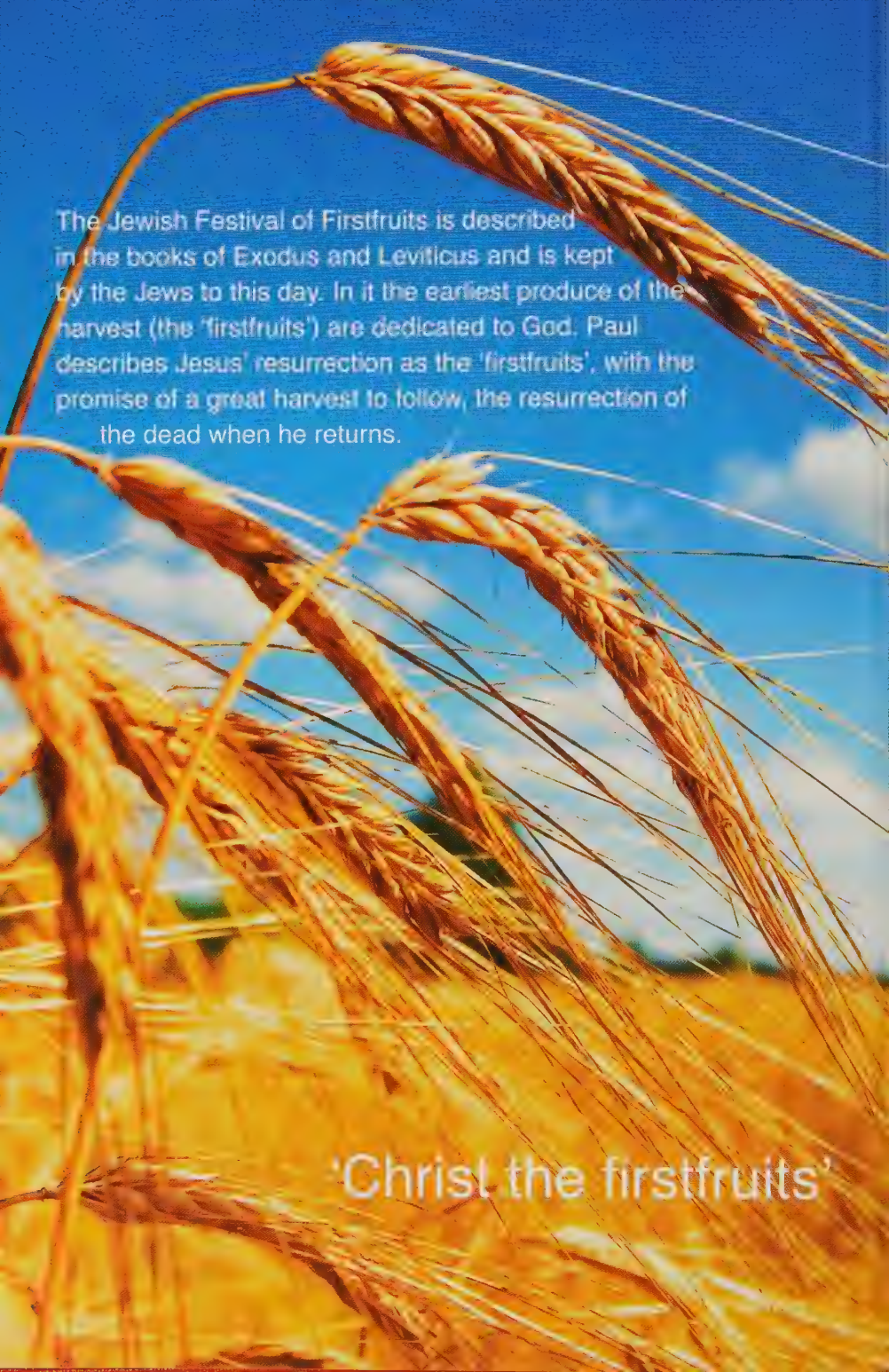
Acts 17:31

the reality of Christ's resurrection

Those who listened to Paul's preaching in Athens were of two minds. We read that '*some mocked*' (Acts 17:32) when they heard about the resurrection. Now questions arise in regard to Christ's resurrection for us – did it really happen, and if it happened what does it mean to us?

Paul sent a letter to the Christians in Corinth who were confused about the miracle of the resurrection. To try and clarify the situation he wrote:

'But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom he did not raise up – if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are



The Jewish Festival of Firstfruits is described in the books of Exodus and Leviticus and is kept by the Jews to this day. In it the earliest produce of the harvest (the 'firstfruits') are dedicated to God. Paul describes Jesus' resurrection as the 'firstfruits', with the promise of a great harvest to follow, the resurrection of the dead when he returns.

'Christ the firstfruits'

still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished'

1 Corinthians 15. 13-18

What does all this mean for us? It means if the dead are not to be raised, Christ who died could not have been raised to life. And if Christ had not been raised, the preaching of the Apostle Paul and the good news preached by all the apostles would have consisted of just empty words. Moreover, if Christ had not been raised from the dead, the Christian faith would be futile, based on falsehood.

The Apostle Paul was confident that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose the third day. The proof to all those who doubted was the testimony of eyewitnesses, the disciples and apostles who willingly gave up their lives to spread the joyful message of the gospel, many times in difficult personal circumstances. The resurrected Jesus appeared to many individuals, including the apostles. After that he was seen by more than five hundred believers at once; last of all he appeared to the Apostle Paul himself on the road to Damascus (see 1 Corinthians 15.5-8). In Paul's time most of the

eyewitnesses were still alive and no doubt they could be consulted to confirm those appearances.

The true Christian hope of eternal life is based on bodily resurrection at the return of Jesus, as Paul explained to the Corinthians:

'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: **Christ the firstfruits**, afterwards those who are Christ's at his coming'. 1 Corinthians 15.22,23

As descendants of Adam we cannot hope to escape death except by becoming '*in Christ*' through belief and baptism and making a commitment to follow him. Then we have the assurance that he will return to raise the dead and reward his faithful followers with the gift of everlasting life.

Do you believe this?

Paul Kimani
Nairobi, Kenya



from our mailbag

A reader wrote to seek clarification as to whether they would be reunited with a family member who had died although the person was not religious.

When a family member or close friend dies it is very sad and leaves a void in our lives. We are unable to see them and enjoy their company and often we miss them terribly. Although we receive sincere condolences, the pain remains. It is also a time for reflection on what does happen at death and in due course our own mortality.

When tragedies like this happen we cling on to the hope that it is not the end and we can meet them again in the future. It is

against this backdrop that people hope that they might be reunited in heaven. But it may come as a surprise to many that the Bible does not offer hope of heaven going at death as the reward for God-fearing people.

However, it is a comforting idea for those recently bereaved to think all is not lost and our loved one is still aware of us and maybe looking down on us in some far off place. This is the same idea that prompted the ancient Egyptians to bury people with the things they might need for the journey and which have been discovered untouched in their final resting places. This ancient belief in the afterlife is based on the assumption that all human beings have an immortal soul that leaves the body at death. This belief is not based on Bible teaching which clearly states that our brief existence is in some respects no different from animals and when we die that is the end.

The wise man Solomon wrote about the reality of human existence. It's worth reading the whole of Ecclesiastes chapter nine but here are some of his words:

'...one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun' Ecclesiastes 9. 3-6

The Bible does however speak of a reward for those deemed worthy like Solomon's father, David King of Israel. It clearly tells us that the reward promised to him was not one that he was to receive straightaway.

Peter makes this clear when addressing a crowd in Jerusalem: *'...let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day... For David did not ascend into the heavens...'* (Acts 2.29, 34). Whilst

David is listed among the heroes of faith in Hebrews chapter 11, we read: *'...all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise'*

(Hebrews 11.39).

So life after death is something believers can look forward to but only when God's kingdom is established on the earth. This will happen when Jesus returns from being with his Father in heaven. This is what he told his followers to pray for in his model prayer: *'Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'* (Matthew 6.10). Again, in the previous chapter he said to his disciples: *'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth'*

(Matthew 5.5).

Those who had faith in God, like King David and many others down through the ages, would have to be brought back to life to be able to *'inherit the earth'* in the kingdom of God. This process is described in the Bible as resurrection from the dead.

A disciple of Jesus called Martha was very upset because her brother Lazarus had died and had already been buried when Jesus came to the house. He was their

close friend, and she had hoped that Jesus would come before her brother died. However, her belief in the resurrection to eternal life is recorded in the Gospel of John: *'Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day"'* (John 11.24). The response of Jesus confirms her belief and tells us that others will also be raised to life again: *'Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, even though he dies, he shall live"'* (John 11.25).

The Bible teaches that not everybody will be raised but only those described as *'the dead in Christ'*. This is emphasised by the Apostle Paul in a letter to the first century Christians at Thessalonica:

'For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first'.

1 Thessalonians 4.16

So we understand that the promise of life after death in God's kingdom is subject to belief and being *'in Christ'*. The words of Jesus himself confirm that baptism by full immersion in water by a

believing adult is necessary as a witness to their commitment: *'He who believes and is baptized will be saved'* (Mark 16.16).

It would be lovely to be able to tell all bereaved people that they will be reunited with their family or friends but to say so would only be meaningless words and worse still, it would not be true, for the truth is sometimes difficult to accept! But we all have treasured memories of those who have died and are thankful for all the help, pleasure and love that they have given us.

In the final analysis the question for all of us is whether we want to acknowledge God and His promise whilst we have life and opportunity – tomorrow may be too late!

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life'.

John 3.16

Correspondence secretary

The Goldilocks Planet

'...he did not create
it a chaos...'

(Isaiah 45.18 RSV)

**'Who's been
sleeping in my
bed?'**



The story is one that many remember from childhood – the golden-haired little girl who finds an empty cottage in the forest. The door is open and she goes in to explore. She does not know that this is home to a family of bears: a large Father Bear, a smaller Mother Bear, and a very small Baby Bear. Everything in the cottage reflects the size and taste of its occupants. She tries the chairs, and one of them is just the right height. She tests the three bowls of porridge on the table and one of them is 'just right'. She tries the three beds: one of them is 'just right' and she falls asleep, to be surprised by the bears on their return. She escapes back into the forest.

The story has the elements of repetition so loved by children, but apart from that...? What has the colour of her hair got to

do with anything? What is the point of the story? And after all the drama, the ending seems a bit feeble. And yet, astonishingly, the term 'Goldilocks' has been adopted by the scientific community, or science writers at least. For Goldilocks, everything had to be 'just right', and the term Goldilocks has been 'hi-jacked' to express this quality of 'justrightness'. In particular the 'Goldilocks Zone' describes that critical region around a star where a planet orbiting the star might be 'just right' for life to flourish, not too hot and not too cold – where water can exist in its liquid form and not boil off or freeze solid. Scientists have identified this as the single most critical feature to enable life to survive. Our planet Earth sits in this critical zone around our Sun, and so it becomes the 'Goldilocks Planet' where things are 'just right' for us and all other living things to flourish.

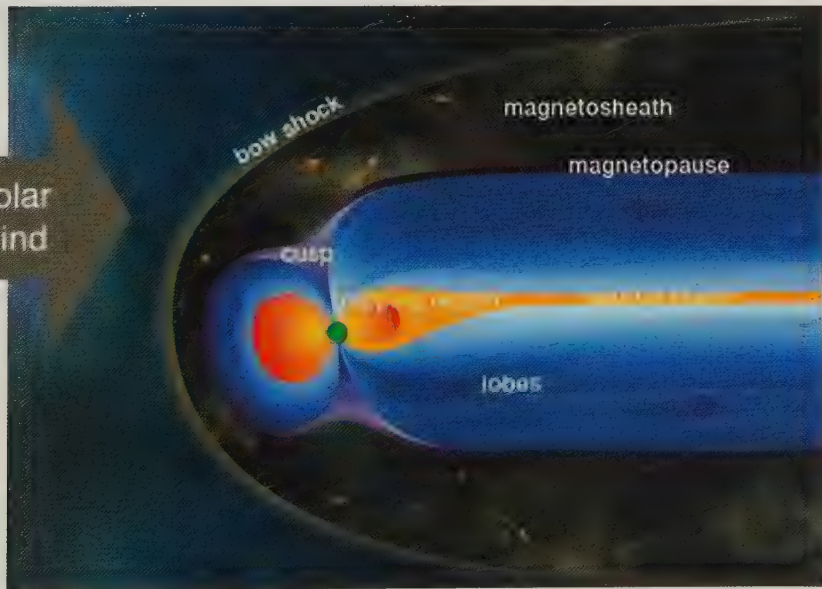
So scientists have at last admitted what believers in creation have been telling them for years, that our Earth is very special, and looks as if it was carefully designed and positioned to allow life to prosper. Astronomers have yet to discover another planet anywhere that is remotely like it. Many believe that somewhere among the one to four hundred billion stars that make up our galaxy, or in the hundred billion galaxies outside our own, there must be others like it, and the search goes on. Others, aware of the astounding complexity of life and the very special conditions required to support it, are not so hopeful. 'A review of habitable zones – for animals as well as microbes, and in the Galaxy and Universe as well as around our Sun – leads to an inescapable conclusion: Earth is a rare place indeed' (Rare Earth: Why complex life is uncommon in the Universe 2003 by Peter Ward and Donald Brownlee).

The need for water to exist in its liquid form has been identified as the most critical feature of an environment that supports life,

but it is far from being the only one. Here are just a few of the other features of our Earth which are special:

1. Earth's atmosphere: a unique mix of 78% oxygen and 21% nitrogen plus other trace gases and water vapour – perfect for life and heavy enough to be retained by the Earth's gravity. Other planets have toxic atmospheres or no atmosphere at all.

2. Earth's magnetic field (magnetosphere): as well as life-giving heat radiation, the Sun also emits a stream of highly dangerous particles described as the solar wind. Earth's magnetic field effectively diverts this stream of particles around and away from the Earth (see diagram below – Earth shown in green).



3. The ozone layer: part of the stratosphere 20-30 km (12-19 miles) above the Earth, rich in ozone. It absorbs 97–99% of the Sun's (medium frequency) ultra-violet light and so prevents ultra-violet damage to exposed forms of life on the Earth's surface.

4. Position in the solar system: Our nearest planet Jupiter has 318 times the mass of the Earth and so its gravity attracts, like a giant Hoover, much of the space debris which would otherwise strike the Earth with catastrophic results. In 1994 Comet Shoemaker Levy 9 crashed into Jupiter and was swallowed up. Computer simulations suggest that these sort of collisions would be thousands of times more frequent on the Earth if Jupiter did not exist, or if it was much smaller or further away.

There is another very different but special feature of our planet. The Milky Way galaxy (see opposite) is a flat spiral shape, and our Sun is positioned towards the outer edge of one of the spiralling arms of the galaxy. Many have noted that from this position **we are ideally placed to observe the rest of the universe**. We can peer into the furthest reaches of space, we can see just how rare and special we are. We can wrestle with the astonishing thought that maybe this entire majestic universe was created just so that our tiny planet should flourish as an Ark, a repository of the teeming life forms that the Creator has placed there to display His glory.

‘The heaven, even the heavens are the LORD’s; but the earth he has given to the children of men’ (Psalm 115.16).

‘...thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!): I am the LORD and there is no other’ (Isaiah 45.18 RSV).

This is the Creator’s message to us, which can be confirmed by our own observation of His mighty handiwork.

Unlike the story of Goldilocks, this is **not** a fairytale!

Roy Toms *Norfolk UK*

30°

75,000 ly

330°

60,000 ly

45,000 ly

Sagittarius Arm

Far 3kpc Arm

Near 3kpc Arm

Scutum-Centaurus Arm

Norma Arm

Outer Arm

Perseus Arm

Sun

Orion Spur

15,000 ly

120°

30,000 ly

150°

180°

210°

240°

The Milky Way

artist's impression



The Bible stands

THE TEST

Hazor
Megiddo
Gezer

The tel of ancient Megiddo, with the valley of Jezreel (Esdraelon) in the background

OF TIME

Ancient mounds that were once cities are made up of multiple layers of debris, each layer representing a different period of occupation. Archaeologists' excavations of these strata carefully unearth objects revealing clues as to who occupied the place, when they occupied it and why. Sometimes evidence is revealed which points to specific events from the distant past. Such is true of the site of Hazor in Northern Israel. When these independently verified events tie in with accounts mentioned in the Bible, this is most exciting and faith-strengthening to a Bible reader, as it shows that what is recorded actually happened.

So when the Bible records the conquest of the promised land of Canaan by the Israelites led by Joshua, it can be demonstrated that the events happened around 3,500 years ago. The Bible confirms the total destruction of the Canaanite city of Hazor by the Israelites under his command: *'But as for the cities that stood on their mounds, Israel burned none of them, except Hazor only, which*

Joshua burned' (Joshua 11.13). Hazor alone was picked out for complete destruction by fire according to this verse. Why was this overthrow necessary from a strategic point of view?

Hazor was the most powerful independent city state at the time for we read that *'Joshua turned back at that time and took Hazor, and struck its king with the sword; for Hazor was formerly the head of all those kingdoms'* (Joshua 11.10). Texts unearthed at Mari in Syria, and Tel-el Amarna in Egypt, describe its important role in international trade and the politics of the time. Located north of the Sea of Galilee, on a hill overlooking the Jezreel valley, on part of the international highway along the coastal plain that led from Assyria to Egypt, its strategic position was very important. Every traveller, soldier and trader would have passed through the city. Its continued existence as an independent antagonist would have made the establishment of the new nation of Israel impossible. Hazor had to be subdued.

Hazor presents one of the largest city mounds in Israel, the whole site being some 200 acres – ten times the size of Jerusalem in the time of David and Solomon. The excavations of Yigael Yadin between 1955 and 1958 began uncovering new evidence of the veracity of the Biblical account. More recently, Hazor dig director, Amnon Ben-Tor, has spent some 30 seasons excavating the mound.

Yadin found that the late Bronze Age city had indeed been destroyed during the 13th century BC, by a fire. This was so intense that it cracked the basalt architectural elements of the palace, the gate shrine and other structures, and left an ash layer up to three feet thick in places (see picture below). The bricks had been ‘fired’ into extremely hard material and the remains of the temple and palace contained burnt fragments of Egyptian

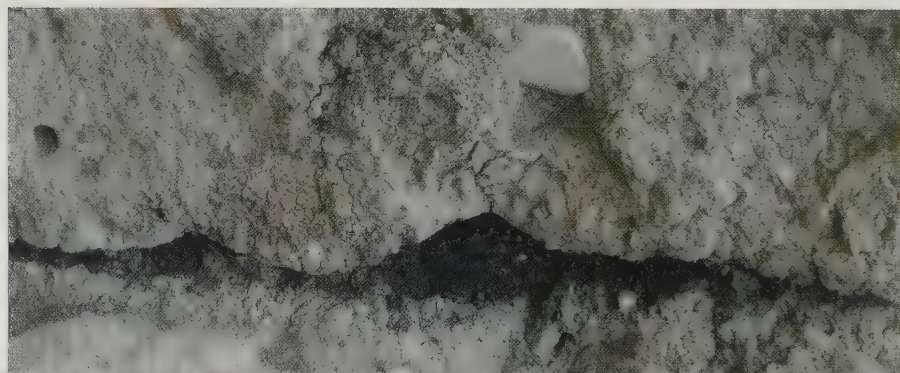
artefacts. These included sculpture, ivory, jewellery, bronze figurines and statues of Canaanite gods. Yigael Yadin was sure, and more recently Amnon Ben-Tor suggests that the evidence does point to the city being taken and burnt in a great fire in the time of Joshua. This is clear evidence of the veracity of the Scriptural account.

For many years after its destruction, only a minor Israelite settlement existed at Hazor. However, during Solomon’s reign we read:

‘And this is the reason for the labour force which Solomon raised: to build the house of the LORD, his own house, the Millo, the wall of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer’.

(1Kings 9.15)

Like Hazor, the other two cities, Megiddo to the south and Gezer

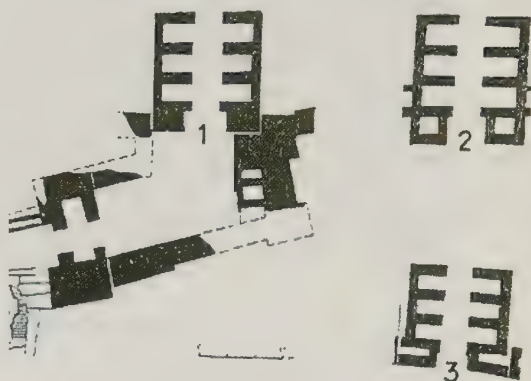


further south still, were vital strategic defensive cities. The mound of Megiddo (see pages 24,25) is close to the only pass through the Carmel range, on the road from Egypt to Syria and Mesopotamia. This was called 'the way of the sea', which leads into the wide Esdraelon valley (also known as the valley of Jezreel) south east of Mt Carmel. Gezer, much further south, was an ancient fortified city which protected the region from threats from the direction of Egypt. The Egyptian Pharaoh had given Gezer to Solomon as a dowry when he married an Egyptian princess (see 1 Kings 9.16).

Yadin's excavations unearthed evidence that the rebuilding of these cities had indeed taken place during the 10th century BC, and the fortification systems were built to an identical design in each city! In particular, the discovery of a distinctive six chambered gate, together with characteristic administrative buildings, are a hallmark of the design of all three city walls.

So sure was Yadin of his conclusions, that he was actually able to predict the pattern for the dig

Six-chambered gates dated to Solomon.
(1) Megiddo. (2) Hazor. (3) Gezer.



through careful measurement, much to the consternation of his team. This is clear evidence of a mastermind behind each of these fortifications – and the Bible tells us it was Solomon. This massive, well planned and high quality building activity exactly corroborates the Biblical account. It has also been confirmed by the latest digs which commenced from 1990, despite challenges to Yadin's conclusions. Yadin wrote of this discovery:

'...as an archaeologist I cannot imagine a greater thrill than working with the Bible in one hand and the spade in the other'.

The Bible also records that Solomon built up a formidable army based around horses and chariots:



'And Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen; he had one thousand four hundred chariots and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem'

1 Kings 10.26

At Megiddo, structures which have been identified as hundreds of stables, were discovered by American archaeologists in the 1930s (see picture above). They concluded these must be Solomon's stables, a name which has stuck, though more recently it has been confirmed that they are later buildings, corresponding to the time of Ahab, king of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Ahab's chariot force was also huge. The battle of Qargar is mentioned in Assyrian tablets where Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC) fought a great confederacy of

princes, including Ahab. Ahab's contribution is estimated at 2,000 chariots and 10,000 men! The city of Jezreel where Jehu confronted Ahab's queen Jezebel (see 2 Kings chapter 9) is a few miles further down the valley to the south east. Digs in the 1990s led to the theory that Jezreel, very strategically placed like Megiddo, was also a mustering point for Ahab's vast army of chariots and cavalry.

Many archaeologists today (though not all) are of the minimalist school. That is, they pay little if any regard to the evidence of the Bible record. However, for the readers of this magazine, who don't share their scepticism, these findings continue to fascinate and encourage us to look further into God's Word.

Justin Giles
London, UK

God's plan in prophecy

How powerless we are when it comes to foretelling the future with any degree of certainty!

Have you ever arranged to meet a friend at a particular place and then after waiting an hour, found he or she has been prevented from coming? Have you ever decided to go out somewhere and when the time has come, found you are not well enough? Have you ever wondered how you are going to live when you are too old to look after yourself?

The answers we give to these simple questions show what frail human beings we really are. We cannot tell what will happen next in our own lives, so what shall we say about men who foretell the destiny of a nation with absolute certainty? If their predictions all came true we would have no option but to admit that here was a power far greater than the human mind. In other words, such a person is speaking by the power of God.

the evidence of fulfilled prophecy

Many events are foretold in the Bible. Many of these predictions have already been fulfilled, whilst others are being fulfilled today. None of them have been proved wrong. The evidence of fulfilled prophecy provides one very good reason for believing that the Bible is true – that it is the Word of God.

In the Bible you will find many examples of fulfilled prophecy including the overthrow of Babylon, the destruction of Jerusalem and the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland, among many others. This evidence serves to confirm the reliability of the Bible and because of this we can equally rely on what it has foretold about the return of Jesus and the establishment of the kingdom of God on the earth.

The Bible contains the most confident assertions about the future; not just one but many prophecies. There are some concerning individuals, others about powerful and weak nations and empires, some of which did

not even exist at the time of the prophecy. There are both long and short term prophecies; prophecies of things to come, the like of which had never happened before; of extraordinary experiences which nations would have – experiences without parallel, contrary to expectation.

God is in control

All this is found in the Bible. We discover that without exception none of the prophecies have been proved to be untrue. What are we to make of this? Could men predict the future in this way? Of course not. There can only be one conclusion – the men who wrote the Bible received direction from God Himself, as one of the prophets recorded:

‘Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure”’

Isaiah 46. 9,10

Do not underestimate the force of Bible prophecy. The Apostle Peter described it as the ‘more sure

word of prophecy’ (2 Peter 1.19 KJV) and compared it to a light shining in a dark place. This is a very apt comparison. We look around the world and see confusion, with no apparent meaning or purpose to life. History seems just a haphazard sequence of events with no obvious aim, apart from the fleeting ambitions of those who pass across the world’s stage.

However a study of the Bible demonstrates beyond all doubt that human affairs are under Divine control and are moving forward to a totally unexpected



climax. The outcome will be a complete surprise to all but a few who understand what the prophet Daniel meant when he wrote:

‘the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he chooses’

Daniel 4.32

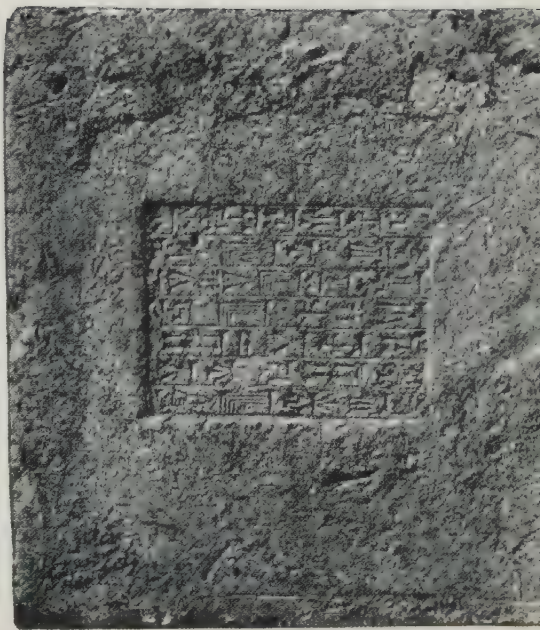
These words were addressed to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. He was no fairy-tale figure, but a powerful monarch in the ancient world. In recent times his capital city Babylon has been excavated and proved to have been the immense city of which the Bible speaks.

The thousands of bricks that have been examined all bear the name of the proud monarch who ruled the world of his day. Indeed, Nebuchadnezzar could claim to be the first monarch of the world. It was he who was told that *‘the Most High rules in the kingdom of men’*, but he was told far more than that.

an amazing dream

One night, as Nebuchadnezzar lay on his couch, the king wondered what would be the fate of his vast empire after he had passed from

LEFT: reconstruction of the Ishtar Gate from Babylon in the Pergamon Museum Berlin.



A brick from Babylon impressed with Nebuchadnezzar's name

the scene. Such thoughts have probably occurred to all men in positions of great authority: ‘On whom will my mantle fall? Will the mantle be torn in pieces by jealous rivals?’ Such questions normally go unanswered, for no man can tell what the future holds. However, Nebuchadnezzar was given the answer by God as we read in Daniel chapter 2.

Please read it through - it is one of the most remarkable chapters in the Bible. It tells us about a dream in which the answer that

Nebuchadnezzar sought was given to him in symbolic form. Why did Almighty God trouble to respond to the questioning of a pagan king; why did He choose to do so by way of a dream and in a form which the king could not understand, nor even remember on waking? The answers will serve to introduce the details of the prophecy and its fulfilment.

The importance of Nebuchadnezzar in the purpose of God lay not so much in the greatness of his empire, as in the fact that it included the land of Israel and that the people of Israel were taken as captives to Babylon for 70 years. God's land and God's people the Jews, were subject to Nebuchadnezzar's rule.

The method used to interpret the dream also brought Daniel, a Jewish captive, to the forefront – the only man who could explain the dream. This underlined the fact that the God *'who reveals secrets'* (Daniel 2.29) is the God especially of Israel – revealing a vital aspect of His plan for the world.

The symbolic style adopted is a most effective way of conveying a great deal of information in a very

compressed form. The modern political cartoon is an example of the same idea. However, the cartoon only illuminates events of the past and present, whereas Nebuchadnezzar's vision shone a great beam of light on the future.

The meaning of the dream

In his dream the king saw what he himself would probably have described as a 'god'. It was the image of a man composed of various metals – gold head, silver chest and arms, bronze belly and thighs, iron legs, feet part iron and part clay. This metallic statue stood erect until some unseen power directed a stone at its feet. The image crashed to the earth, its remains were ground to powder and blown away and the stone that had inflicted the damage *'became a great mountain and filled the whole earth'* (Daniel 2.35).

What did all this mean?

The clear words of the prophet Daniel placed the meaning beyond doubt. The image stood for the kingdoms of

men in the ages that were to follow. The nations of the known world were at the time subject to the king of Babylon, who was represented by the golden head:

'you are this head of gold'.

After this there was to follow a second 'silver' empire, then a third of bronze and a fourth. The fourth kingdom was to be '*strong as iron*' (Daniel 2. 38-40).

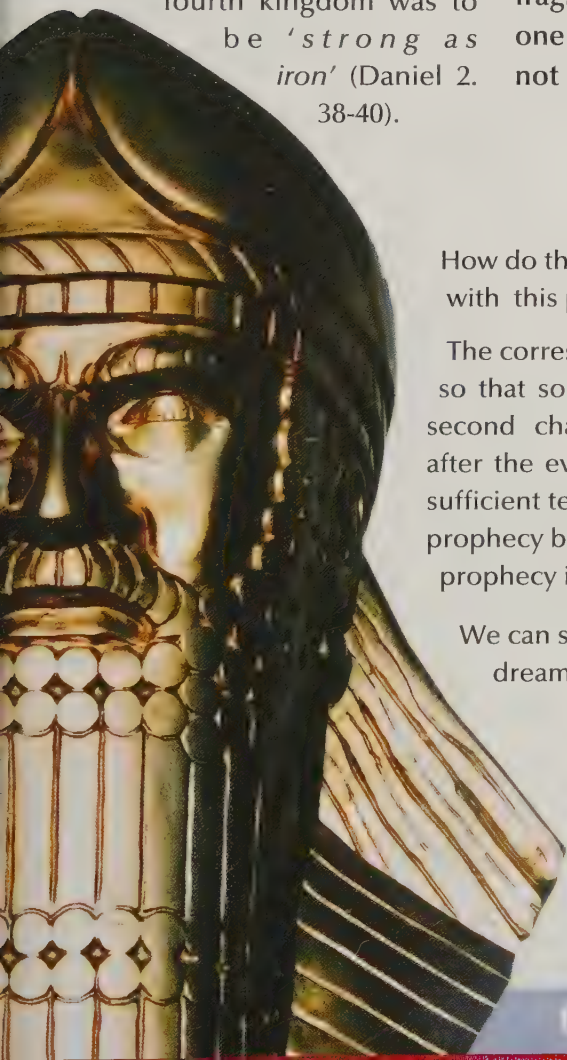
However, after the strength was to come weakness:

'Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided... as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile... they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay'. Daniel 2.41-43

How do the facts of history compare with this prophecy?

The correspondence is perfect, so much so that some have tried to say that the second chapter of Daniel was written after the events that it describes! This is sufficient testimony to the accuracy of the prophecy but is plainly false, for the prophecy is still being fulfilled!

We can summarise the meaning of the dream as follows:



head of GOLD

BABYLON

**chest and arms of
SILVER**

MEDO-PERS

**belly and thighs of
BRONZE**

GREECE

legs of IRON

ROME

**feet - a mixture of
IRON & CLAY**

**DIVIDED
NATIONS**

'You, O king... are this head of gold...'

**head of fine Gold =
NEBUCHADNEZZAR/
BABYLONIAN EMPIRE**

'...But after you shall arise another kingdom...'

**chest and arms of Silver =
MEDO-PERSIAN EMPIRE**

'...then another, a third kingdom of bronze...'

**belly and thighs of Bronze =
GREEK EMPIRE**

'...And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron...'

**legs of Iron = ROMAN
EMPIRE**

'...the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay...they will not adhere to one another...'

**feet of Iron and Clay =
DIVIDED NATIONS**

'And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed...it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the

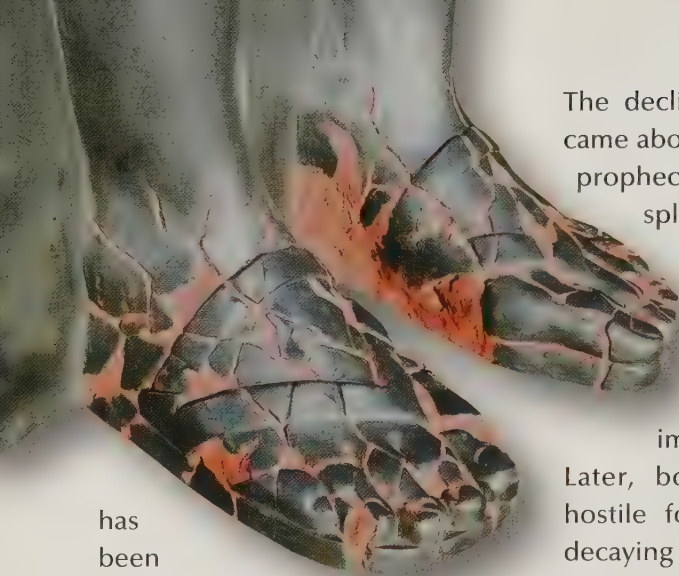
mountain without hands... the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this.'

stone = Jesus Christ, the king over the kingdom of God.

an outline of world history

Four great empires followed each other. Consult any history book covering the period and you will discover how Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians, an empire in which first the Medes and then the Persians were predominant. Their supremacy was ended by Alexander the Great who founded the Greek Empire. This in turn yielded to Rome which was unquestionably the strongest and most durable of the four world empires.

The world had never known anything to compare with the '*strong as iron*' Roman Empire. What power on earth could ever break it or conquer it? No single power could, for as Daniel predicted, Rome was not to be superseded by another great empire. The strongest empire was destined to decay and disintegrate; a long drawn out process which



has been traced in detail in Gibbon's monumental work entitled 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.' Gibbon described the Roman Empire at its height in these words reminiscent of Daniel's prophecy:

'The arms of the republic... advanced with rapid steps to the Euphrates, the Danube, the Rhine, and the Ocean; and the images of gold, or silver, or brass, that might serve to represent the nations and their kings, were successively broken by the iron monarchy of Rome'.

(Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire, Chandos Classics edition Volume 2 ch.38, page 576)

The decline of this great empire came about as decreed by Daniel's prophecy. Firstly the empire was split into two parts – the Eastern part ruled from Constantinople and the Western part ruled from Rome. You will remember that the image had two iron legs. Later, both parts gave way to hostile forces from without and decaying processes within. Over the vast area once ruled by Rome a number of independent kingdoms emerged, some strong and some weak. This divided state of the nations has continued since that time.

There has been no fifth undisputed world empire in succession to the four represented by the image!

Many attempts have been made to unite the nations of Europe by conquest but all have failed. Philip II of Spain, Napoleon I of France, Kaiser Wilhelm II and Hitler in Germany and others have tried but failed. Today we see the countries of the old Roman Empire in Europe trying to weld themselves together into a united whole. What a task it is proving! The prophet Daniel's words were true:

‘They will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay’.

Who could have foreseen all this as long as two thousand six hundred years ago? Who could have asserted so confidently that there would be four empires, not three, or five, or six? Who, in a few bold strokes, could have delineated the outstanding features of their history and its sequel with uncanny accuracy? Could any man? From all that we know of human forecasts, the answer is **NO!**

We note that Daniel disclaimed all credit for his message: *‘...the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure’* (Daniel 2.45). Men and women who have since studied this prophecy have found here solid grounds for confidence in God and His Word. It is a confidence that you can share.

part of the prophecy is still in the future

Moreover, the accurate fulfillment of Daniel’s words leads us to look with renewed interest at the last stage of the prophecy. What

shall we make of that stone which fell with shattering effect on the feet of the image, grinding it to powder, and then becoming a great mountain to fill the world? If the image represented the kingdom of men, the stone must stand for a power external to human rule, which is to establish itself as a world power upon the ruins of human governments. These it will *‘break in pieces and consume’*. This is the explanation Daniel gave:

‘And in the days of these kings (i.e. the divided state of the nations) **the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever’.**

Daniel 2.44

the stone

This is one of many promises in the Bible assuring us that God has not forsaken the earth. He has devised a plan – the Master Plan for human salvation – and the Lord Jesus Christ is the focal point of that plan. Thoughtful readers will readily be able to identify the stone *‘cut out of the mountain*



without hands' with the one who was born the saviour of mankind. He was '*cut out*' of the mountain of humanity, not by human hands, but by the power of God through the miracle of his birth. Jesus himself spoke of his future role as the stone:

'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner-stone. This was the LORD'S doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes... And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whoever it falls, it will grind him to powder'

Matthew 21. 42, 44

All the signs indicate that soon the stone will fall with devastating effect on an unsuspecting world. Will you be among those who escape the coming destruction?

Note: the above article is an extract from the special edition '**Light on Bible Prophecy**'. Please send for your free copy (see opposite page).

Herodian masonry of the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Jesus is described as both the cornerstone and the foundation stone of God's purpose.

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The earliest **OLYMPIC GAMES** were religious festivals as well as athletic (see editorial page 3). It might seem that the religious element has totally vanished from the modern Games – but it is remarkable how many athletes chose the Olympic stage to witness to their personal faith. The Fiji Rugby 7s team, having just won their final game to take the gold medal, joined together in a hymn of praise. The South African runner Van Neikerk (see picture below) said in an interview after setting a new World Record in the 400m, "I am really just blessed and thankful to the Lord for this opportunity".

'Give him the credit for everything you accomplish' said Solomon (Proverbs 3. 6 'The Voice'). The believer in Christ is running a race of a different kind, requiring complete commitment to God and trust in His loving care and guiding hand, leading to an assured victory:

'holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain or toil in vain'.

Philippians 2.16

